

REMARKS

The Office Action noted a number of informalities in the specification as originally filed, and required correction of the drawings and the specification. Substitute specification and drawings are submitted herewith, along with a marked copy showing the revisions from the original. Changes are for clarity and to correct typographical and grammatical errors. No new matter has been added.

Applicants have added two new figures, which are flowcharts, and the specification was amended to include references to the two new figures. Applicants respectfully submit that the new figures come directly from the specification and claims, and no new matter has been added. The new figures should address the requirements set forth in the Office Action. The Examiner is invited to contact Applicants' attorney if any further revisions to the specification or drawings are required.

Claims Status

Claims 1-15 were pending in the Application. Claims 1-15 stand rejected. Claims 1-4, 8, 9, and 12 are amended by the present Amendment. Claim 5 has been canceled and new claims 16-20 have been added by the present Amendment. Support for the amendments may be found throughout the specification. Claim 12 is amended to correct the typographical error noted in the Office Action. Upon entry of the present Amendment, claims 1-20 will be pending and are presented for reconsideration.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §112

Claims 1-14 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the invention. Applicant has amended the specification and the claims to address the rejections raised in the Office Action.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §103

Claims 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, and 13 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being

unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6009242 to Anzai ("Anzai") in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,535,311 to Zimmerman ("Zimmerman"). Claim 2 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Anzai in view of Zimmerman and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,181,435 to Onondera ("Onondera"). Claims 4, 5, 9, 10, 14, and 15 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Anzai in view of Zimmerman and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,038,340 to Ancin et al. ("Ancin"). Claims 7 and 12 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Anzai in view of Zimmerman and further in view of Russ and further in view of the TIFF Specification Final Revision 6.0 and the Graphics Interchange Format Version 89a Specification.

Anzai

Anzai communicates image data to a printer “in such a manner that data is transferred from the print controller to the printer engine while being appropriately compressed by the print controller.” (Col. 1, lines 60-63). Anzai intends to “attain an efficient print operation while reducing the data amount to be transferred from the print controller to a printing engine.” (Col. 1, lines 57-59). Anzai “determines whether or not a band or a page of the image data generated by the generator is to be compressed, on the basis of an amount of the generated image data to be transferred to the printer.” (Abstract). Anzai first compresses the data: “a data compression section (the CPU 4 constitutes means for compressing output data on the basis of a data compression program stored in the ROM 3) for compressing generated output data.” (Col. 7, lines 5-9). Anzai then selects the smaller of the compressed or non-compressed data to communicate to the printer:

The CPU 4 selects one of the compressed data and output data as original data of the compressed data, and writes the selected data in the RAM 5 as transfer data. The controller 7 transfers the compressed data or output data written in the RAM 5 to the print mechanism 8 as transfer data via the predetermined interface. In this manner, the amount of data to be transferred from the controller 7 to the print mechanism 8 can be reduced, and the transfer time can be shortened.

(Col. 7, lines 14-22). In sum, Anzai compresses the image data, and then communicates either the compressed data or the uncompressed data.

Zimmerman

Zimmerman uses “multiple data compression procedures” that “operate with varying efficiencies on different image types.” (Col. 3, lines 32-36). Zimmerman “count[s] 1-to-0 and 0-to-1 transitions in each data segment” and “find[s] an average number of transitions over all data segments.” (Col. 3, lines 38-42). Zimmerman then “determine[s] for all data segments in the multi-pixel image, a transition array” and “employ[s] the average number of transitions per data segment and the transition array to identify a data compression procedure to be employed for the multi-pixel image.” (Col. 3, lines 42-47).

Zimmerman states that the number of 1-0 and 0-1 transitions are an indicator of image clustering: “The average number of transitions per byte (which have transitions) represents a coarse indication of the level of clustering of the image.” (Col. 4, line 67 – col. 5, line 2). The

transition array gives a “more precise classification of the type of image dither.” (Col. 5, lines 3-4). Once the type of dither is identified, Zimmerman assigns a compression procedure: “[A] compression procedure is assigned (box 48) based upon the type of dither determined.”

Onondera

Onondera teaches an image forming method and apparatus that attempts to avoid “over-run” by reliably performing image formation. (Col. 2, lines 20-24). Onondera does this by receive[ing] image data generated in page description language ... [and] convert[ing it] into coded raster data in band units.” (Col. 5, lines 14-19). Onondera then predicts “processing time to generate raster data from [the] coded band data.” (Abstract). The prediction time is “used for determining whether or not the raster-data generation takes time longer than time for transmitting data to a printer engine.” (Abstract). If the raster-data generation time is longer than the data transmission time, “raster data is generated from coded band data, and compressed and stored as preparation for printing.” (Abstract). Onondera further suggests that the “compression method is changed to another compression method” if, for instance, “the currently-obtained memory size is ... insufficient” to store the raster data or if a predicted time to expand the compressed data does not complete before printing starts (Col. 3, lines 38-42; col. 6, lines 35-43).

Ancin

Ancin teaches a system and method for “automatically detecting image black and white points for a digital image.” (Col. 1, lines 55-57). The system includes “image partitioning routines, a pixel counter, block validity testing routines and pixel clustering routines.” (Col. 1, lines 57-59). The image partitioning routines “divide [a] digital image ... into a series of local image blocks.” (Col. 4, lines 10-15). The pixel counter “compute[s] the number of black pixels and the number of white pixels in the selected block.” (Col. 4, lines 18-19). Block validity testing routines “examine the black and white counts ... to determine whether the block being processed contains sufficient numbers of black pixels and of white pixels to classify the block as having dark text on a light background.” (Col. 4, lines 37-41). Pixel clustering routines “locate black pixel and white pixel groupings, separately.” (Col. 4, lines 57-58).

These References Do Not Teach or Suggest the Claimed Invention

Independent Claim 1

Amended independent claim 1 recites, in part, a “processor configured to determine if the stored sequence of characters corresponds to one of a banded image and a page image, to operate in a first mode to encode the stored sequence of characters if the sequence of characters is determined to correspond to the banded image, and to operate in a second mode, different than the first mode, to encode the stored sequence of characters if the stored sequence of characters is determined to correspond to the page image.”

For example, neither Anzai, Zimmerman, Onondera, or Ancin, alone or in combination, teach or suggest at least “to operate in a first mode to encode the stored sequence of characters if the sequence of characters is determined to correspond to the banded image,” and “to operate in a second mode, different than the first mode, to encode the stored sequence of characters if the stored sequence of characters is determined to correspond to the page image,” as recited in independent claim 1.

Anzai does not teach or suggest operating in distinct modes to encode a sequence of characters corresponding to a page image and a sequence of characters corresponding to a banded image. Instead, and as the Office Action acknowledges, Anzai does not have two encoding modes of operation. (Office Action, page 9; para. 16.). Anzai uses the same compression technique regardless of the type of data.

*Zimmerman
teaches
distinction
reference -
not Anzai*

*** Zimmerman fails to remedy the deficiencies of Anzai because Zimmerman does not teach or suggest determining whether a sequence of characters corresponds to a banded image or a page image. Zimmerman does not identify or distinguish between a banded image or a page image. Instead, as described above, Zimmerman determines the average number of 0-1 and 1-0 transitions, generates a transition array, and then based on the average number of transitions and the transition array identifies the data compression technique. The transition array identifies 0-1 and 1-0 transitions, which may not necessarily correspond to a banded image or a page image. As a result, Zimmerman does not teach or suggest the elements of claim 1 missing from Anzai.

Onondera also fails to remedy the deficiencies of Anzai because Onondera does not teach or suggest determining whether a sequence of characters corresponds to a banded image or a page image. Instead, and as described above, Onondera attempts to avoid over-run by predicting

X the processing time to generate raster data from coded band data and changing a compression method if the memory size is insufficient to store the raster data or if a predicted time to expand the compressed data does not complete before printing starts. Thus, rather than determining whether a sequence of characters corresponds to a banded image or a page image, Onondera always converts image data into coded band data. Therefore, Onondera does not teach or suggest the elements of claim 1 and consequently fails to cure the deficiencies of Anzai.

X Additionally, Ancin also fails to remedy the deficiencies of Anzai. In particular, Ancin teaches a system and method for “automatically detecting image black and white points for a digital image.” (Col. 1, lines 55-57). Ancin does not, however, teach or suggest distinguishing between a banded image and a page image or any type of compression techniques. Thus, Ancin does not teach or suggest the elements of claim 1 and consequently fails to cure the deficiencies of Anzai.

Accordingly, the references cited by the Examiner, alone or in combination, fail to teach or suggest the recited elements of independent claim 1. Dependent claims 2-5 are patentable because they depend on a patentable base claim. These claims may also include other features not taught or suggested by the cited references.

Independent Claim 6

Independent claim 6 recites, in part, “encoding the received image data in accordance with a first encoding technique, if the received image data is determined to correspond to the banded image data; and encoding the received image data in accordance with a second encoding technique, different than the first encoding technique, if the received image data is determined to correspond to the page image data.” As described above, neither Anzai, Zimmerman, Onondera, nor Ancin teach or suggest distinguishing between banded image data and page image data. Applicant therefore respectfully submits that the subject matter of independent claim 6, and the claims that depend therefrom, do not fall within the disclosures of Anzai, Zimmerman, Onondera, and/or Ancin, either alone or in combination.

Independent Claim 11

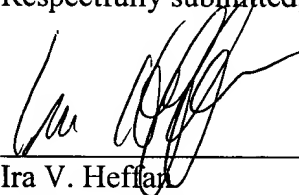
Independent claim 11 recites, in part, “a raster image processor configured to determine if a sequence of characters corresponds to one of a banded image and a page image, to operate in a

first mode to encode the sequence of characters if the sequence of characters is determined to correspond to the banded image, and to operate in a second mode, different than the first mode, to encode the sequence of characters if the sequence of characters is determined to correspond to the page image.” As described above, neither Anzai, Zimmerman, Onondera, nor Ancin teach or suggest distinguishing between banded image data and page image data. Applicant therefore respectfully submits that the subject matter of independent claim 11, and the claims that depend therefrom, do not fall within the disclosures of Anzai, Zimmerman, Onondera, and/or Ancin, either alone or in combination.

CONCLUSION

Applicants respectfully request that the Examiner reconsider the application and claims in light of the foregoing Amendment and Response, and respectfully submit that the claims are in condition for allowance. If, in the Examiner's opinion, a telephonic interview would expedite the favorable prosecution of the present application, the undersigned attorney would welcome the opportunity to discuss any outstanding issues, and to work with the Examiner toward placing the application in condition for allowance.

Respectfully submitted,



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RELATED APPLICATIONS

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[0001] This application is related to U.S. application Ser. No. _____, 09/750,188, (Attorney Docket: 3175-51), entitled "Enhanced Data Compression Technique" and filed concurrently herewith on Dec. 29, 2000.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present application relates generally to data compression and more particularly to an enhanced data compression technique. This technique is particularly suitable for use in the graphical arts for compressing large images.

BACKGROUND ART OF THE INVENTION

[0003] In the graphic arts there is a tendency to have extremely large, one-bit-per-sample images approaching or even exceeding 2 gigabytes of data. The need to compress such data has been well known for many years.

[0004] One proposed technique for compressing such data is commonly referred to as a ~~pack-bit~~ (PackBits, hereinafter "PB"), compression technique. ~~Using proposed~~ The PB compression techniques, technique produces either a string of characters ~~is preceded~~ with a count and a repeat character code or, ~~alternatively,~~ a single byte pattern is preceded with a count. ~~Proposed~~ The PB compression techniques are capable of processing data very quickly. ~~These techniques~~ This technique also provides satisfactory results ~~if when~~ the data is ~~either a string of~~ solid black or solid white, ~~and hence~~ digitally represented in binary form by a repeating string of 1's or 0's respectively. Accordingly, the PB techniques provides reasonably satisfactory results for non-color image data.

[0005] An exemplary ~~pack-bits~~ PackBits representation of a stream of sequential input data, as it would appear entering a processor prior to encoding, might include the string of characters `"abc000000000"`. Using the PB technique, the processor would first ~~determined whether or not the~~ determine if a first character `"a"` and ~~the~~ a second character `"b"` ~~match~~ are the same character. ~~Under~~ In some proposed PB techniques, the processor might scan ahead to consider ~~other matches in certain of the~~ subsequent characters when determining if a stream contains the same repeated character. In ~~any event, since in~~ the present example, the ~~determination-~~ is comparison that determines if "a" and "b" are the same character returns a negative, the result. The processor then proceeds to encode the input data as a literal string with a length. ~~Next~~ The processor ~~next determines whether or not if~~ the second character `"b"` and the third character `"c"` ~~match~~ are the same character. Since this determination is also negative, the processor will proceed to encode the three characters of the input data as a literal string with a length. The processor ~~now then~~ determines whether or not if the third character `"c"` and the fourth character `"0"` ~~match~~ are the same character. Since this determination is also negative, the processor will proceed to encode the four characters of the input data as a literal string with a length. The processor continues ~~by determining whether or not and determines if~~ the fourth character `"0"` and the fifth character `"0"` ~~match~~ are the same character. Since this determination is positive, the processor continues by repeatedly determining whether or not if the immediately subsequent characters in the sequence are also match, the same character until it makes a negative determination. The processor thereby determines the repeat count for the character `"0"`. Based on the initial positive determination, the processor also proceeds to encode the first three characters of the input data sequence, i.e. `"a","b"` and `"c,"` as a literal string with a length and the following 10 characters of the input data sequence, i.e. the `"0"`. . . `"0","0,"` as a repeat character with a count.-

[0006] Accordingly, the processor generates encoded output data forming a 2-byte sequence including the strings of characters `"82abc"` and `"090"`. In the output data, the `"8"` serves as a header ~~and indicates~~ indicating that the total length of the sequence is 8 bits and that a literal

string follows. The "2" indicates that the length of the literal string is three characters, i.e. characters "a", "b", and "c". The first "0" indicates that a repeat character follows, and the "9" indicates that the repeat character represented by the second "0" is repeated 10 times. Using one-off numbers such as the "2" to indicate a literal string of 3 characters, and the "9" to indicate that a repeat character is repeated 10 times. Using one-off numbers such as the "2" to indicate a literal string of 3 characters, and the "9" to indicate that a repeat character is repeated 10 times, is efficient because 129 bytes can be packed using number up to 128.

[0007] To decode the encoded sequence "82abc090,090," the receiving processor first reads the new header "8","8," which is the highest order bit, and from. From the header, the processor determines that a literal string follows. The processor then extracts the string length, "2","2," and reads the next three characters "a","b" and "c". At this stage, the output string is "abc" and the remaining input string is "090." The processor next then reads the first "0" and from this determines which indicates that a repeat character follows. The processor continues by extracting the repeat count, "9","9," and reading then reads the next character "0", which is "0," the character to be repeated 10 times. It will be recognized that by using one-off numbers such as the "2" to indicate a literal. The resulting decoded string of 3 characters and is "abc0000000000," is the "9" string originally presented prior to indicate that a repeat character is repeated 10 times, a close to 1% improvement is obtainable because 128 bytes can be packed into 129 encoding.

[0008] As should be clear from the above, the PB techniques processes only one character at a time. Accordingly, PB techniques are incapable of compressing strings of repeating multiple byte patterns of characters. The PB techniques also have a relatively limited compression rate, generally no more than 64 to 1. Thus, the PB compression techniques provides unsatisfactory results when used to compress color image data, which typically contains repeating multi-byte patterns of characters instead of repeating single-byte 0s and 1s.

[0009] Another proposed technique for compressing image data is commonly referred to as the Lempel-Ziv-Welch (hereinafter "LZW"), compression technique. Using proposed the LZW

compression ~~technique~~ technique, variable length of strings of byte based data can be processed. ~~Proposed~~ The LZW compression technique, processes the data somewhat slower than the PB compression techniques, but provides satisfactory results on data representing both color images as well as ~~and~~ black and white images. However, since these techniques are based on single bytes of data, such techniques are incapable of compressing data on an arbitrary pixel or bit boundary basis. Additionally, ~~although such techniques, are~~ though LZW is capable of providing a higher compression rate than PB, LZW's compression techniques, LZW techniques rate is still offer a somewhat limited compression rate.

~~An exemplary LZW representation of a stream of sequential input data, as it would appear entering a processor prior to encoding, might include the string of characters "abc01c01". [0010]~~ Using the LZW technique, the encoding and decoding processors must coordinate on the transmission and receipt of codes. The LZW techniques uses a compression dictionary containing some limited number of compression codes defined during the processing of the input data. The characters in the input string are read on a character by character basis to determine if a sub-string of characters match a compression code defined during the processing of prior characters in the input string. If sea pattern match is found, the matching sub-string of characters ~~are~~ is encoded with the applicable compression code. If a sub-string of characters does not match a pre-existing code, a new code corresponding to the sub-string is added to the dictionary. Sub-strings are initially defined by codes having 9 bits or digits, but the number of bits may be increased up to 12 bits to add new codes. Once the 12 bit limit is exceeded, the dictionary is reset and subsequent codes are again defined initially with 9 bits. In conventional implementations of the LZW techniques, two codes are predefined, i.e. defined prior to initiating processing of the input string. In the present example these codes are the code 100, representing a "reset," and the code 101, representing an "end. " In the present example, the codes 102, 103, and 104 ~~104~~, etc. represent strings of new patterns that are identified during the processing of the input data.

[0011] An exemplary LZW representation of a stream of sequential input data, as it would appear entering a processor prior to encoding, might include the string of characters "abc0lc0l". Using the LZW technique, the encoding processor ~~would first read~~s the "'a'" in the sequence and the "'b'" immediately thereafter ~~in the sequence~~. The processor then determines if a code exists for the character sequence "'ab'". Since, in this example, no such code exists at this point in the processing, a new code 103 is generated to represent the new pattern string "'ab'" and is added to the existing code dictionary. The processor continues by reading the "'c'" immediately following the "'b'" in the sequence. The processor determines if a code exists for the character sequence "'bc'". Since, in this example, no such code exists at this point in the processing, a new code 104 is generated to represent the new pattern string "'bc'" and the code is added to the code dictionary.

[0012] The processor continues ~~by and readings~~ the "'0'" immediately following the "'c'" in the sequence. The processor determines if a code exists for the character sequence "'c0'". Since, in this example, no such code exists at this point in the processing, a new code 105 is generated to represent the new pattern string "'c0'" and the code is added to the code dictionary. The processor continues ~~further by reading and reads~~ the "'1'" immediately following the "'0'" in the sequence. The processor determines if a code exists for the character sequence "'01'". Since, in this example, no such code exist at this point in the processing, a new code 106 is generated to represent the new pattern string "'01'" and the code is added to the dictionary. The processor proceeds ~~by and readings~~ the "'c'" immediately following the "'1'" in the sequence. The processor determines if a code exists for the character sequence "'1c'". Since, in this example, no such code exists at this point in the processing, a new code 107 is generated to represent the new pattern string "'1c'" and the new code is added to the dictionary.

[0013] The processor proceeds by reading the "'0'" immediately following the second "'c'" in the sequence. The processor determines if a code exists for the character sequence "'c0'". In this example, such a code, i.e. code 105, does exist. The processor therefore ~~proceeds by reading~~, determines if a longer pattern match can be made, and reads the "'1'" immediately following the

second "c0" in the sequence. The processor determines if a code exists for the character sequence "c0". Since, in this example, such a code does not exist, a new code 108 is generated to represent the new pattern string "c01", which can also be represented as "1051". The processor ultimately generates encoded output data ~~forming a~~ that forms the sequence ~~including the string~~ of characters: "100abc01c1051". The sequence, broken down into symbols represents: a reset (100); a literal string (abc01c); a previously found pattern (105); and a literal (1).

[0014] Using the LZW technique, the encoding processor builds a tree of codes generated using other codes. This is a primary reason why the LZW techniques provides satisfactory results even though processing is performed on a byte by byte basis to find repeating ~~bytes~~ byte patterns. That is, the downstream encoding builds on the upstream encoding. However, using the LZW technique, the encoding processor can take significant processing time to encode large sequences. For example, if there is a large, ~~say a megabyte,~~ occurrence of adjacent 0's or 1's, a significant period of time will be required by the processor to encode the sequence.

[0015] The decoding processor builds a similar tree from the codes received from the encoding processor. Basically, the decoding processor performs the reciprocal of the encoding process to decode the encoded sequence characters "100abc011051".

[0016] In summary, the PB compression technique is deficient in that it addresses only single byte repeats and is limited to a 64 to 1 compression rate. Therefore, it is not suitable for color images. On the other hand, while the LZW compression technique addresses multi-byte repeats and has a compression rate of perhaps 500 to 1, ~~but~~ it requires significant processing time to build the codes ~~which that~~ are required to obtain good compression. Hence, although the LZW technique may be suitable ~~wherefor encoding~~ relatively small amounts of data ~~are involved,~~ ~~where the~~ when encoding of gigabytes of data is required, such as ~~with an 80 inch times x 50 inch image having 2400 dots per inch,~~ the processing time and/or resources necessary to encode data ~~using the LZW technique~~ make using the LZW technique alone impractical.

[0017] Accordingly, ~~a~~the need exists for a technique which can quickly compress large amounts of image data, offer a still higher compression rate than previously proposed techniques, and provide satisfactory results when used to compress either color or non-color image data.

OBJECTIVESOBJECTIVE SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0018] It is an object of the present the invention ~~to provide~~provides a technique for quickly compressing large amounts of image data.

[0019] It is a further object of the present the invention ~~to provide~~provides a technique which facilitates high compression rates for ~~either~~both color ~~or~~and non-color image data.

~~It is yet another object of the present~~[0020] The invention ~~to provide~~provides a technique ~~which~~that gives satisfactory results when used to compress ~~either~~both color ~~or~~and non-color image data. ~~Additional objects, advantages, novel features of the present invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art from this disclosure, including the following detailed description, as well as by practice of the invention. While the invention is described below with reference to preferred embodiment(s), it should be understood that the invention is not limited thereto. Those of ordinary skill in the art having access to the teachings herein will recognize additional implementations, modifications, and embodiments, as well as other fields of use, which are within the scope of the invention as disclosed and claimed herein and with respect to which the invention could be of significant utility.~~

SUMMARY DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

[0021] According to one embodiment of the ~~present~~ invention, an encoder for compressing image information ~~includes~~comprises a memory and a processor. The memory is configured to

store a sequence of characters representing an image. The processor is configured to determine if the stored sequence of characters corresponds to either a banded image, such as a segment or slice across the entire image, or a page image, such as one of multiple separate images making up the entire image. ~~The processor operates in a first mode to encode the stored sequence of characters, if~~ If the stored sequence of characters is determined to correspond to ~~the~~ a banded image, ~~The processor operates in a second mode, different than the first mode, to encode the stored sequence of characters, if.~~ If the stored sequence of characters is determined to correspond to ~~the~~ a page image, the processor operates in a second mode to encode the stored sequence of characters.

[0022] Preferably, when the processor encodes the stored sequence of characters in accordance with a pack-bit compression technique is operating in the first mode of operation, PackBits compression is used, and when the processor is operating in accordance with ~~an~~ the second mode, LZW compression technique is used by default. However, if while in the second mode of operation. Beneficially, the processor is also configured to encode the stored sequence of characters in accordance with a pack-bit determines that PackBits compression technique is appropriate, e.g. when presented with a string of repeating 0s or 1s, the second mode of operation, processor may switch to using PackBits as the compression technique until it is no longer appropriate. Making this can be beneficial in some cases transition between compression techniques does not change the mode from second to first. The mode remains the same, only which compression technique is used is altered.

[0023] Advantageously, if the stored sequence during operation of characters is determined to correspond to the ~~page~~ second image mode, the processor is can be further configured to determine if the stored sequence of characters corresponds to a primarily white page image or a primarily black page image. For example, ~~which~~ that might be the case for a template type page, if the page is primarily white or primarily black. The processor encodes the stored sequence of characters using a PackBits compression technique. If the page image. If so is neither primarily black nor primarily white, the processor encodes the stored sequence of characters in accordance with a

~~first compression technique, e.g. a pack-bit compression technique, while operating in the second mode of operation. If not, the processor encodes the stored first sequence of characters in accordance with a second compression technique, different than the first compression technique, e.g. an LZW compression technique, while operating in the second mode of operation.~~

[0024] In one practical implementation, an imaging system may include a raster image processor which determines if a sequence of characters corresponds to a banded image or a page image.
~~The~~ If the sequence of characters is determined to correspond to a banded image, the raster image processor then operates in ~~at~~ the first mode to encode the sequence of characters ~~if~~. If the sequence of characters is determined to correspond to the a banded page image, and to the processor operates in a second mode, different than the first mode, to encode the sequence of characters if the sequence of characters is determined to correspond to the page image.

[0025] An imager controller receives the encoded sequence of characters. The imager controller then operates in either ~~at~~ the first mode or ~~the~~ second mode to decode the received encoded sequence of characters back into the unencoded sequence of characters. More particularly, ~~the controller operates in a first mode if the encoded sequence of characters corresponds to the a banded image, and the controller operates in at the second~~ first mode if. If the encoded sequence of characters corresponds to the a page image, the controller operates in the second mode.

[0026] Preferably, in the first mode of operation, the raster image processor encodes the sequence of characters ~~in accordance with~~ using a pack-bit PackBits compression technique ~~in~~. In the first ~~second~~ mode of operation, ~~and in accordance with an~~ the raster image processor uses the LZW compression technique in the second mode of operation by default. Beneficially, the raster image processor is also capable of encoding the sequence of characters ~~in accordance with~~ using a pack-bit PackBits compression technique in the second mode of operation if appropriate.

[0027] ~~In accordance with other aspects of the invention~~ embodiments, while operating in the second mode, if the ~~first~~ sequence of characters is determined to correspond to ~~the a~~ page image,

the raster image processor then determines if the sequence of characters corresponds to an image that is primarily white-page-image or a primarily black-page-image. If so, the raster image processor encodes the sequence of characters in accordance with using a first compression technique, for example, such as a pack-bitPackBits technique, while operating in the second mode of operation. If not the image is neither primarily black nor primarily white, the raster image processor encodes the sequence of characters in accordance with using a second compression technique which is different than, for example, the first compression technique, such as a LZW technique, while operating in the second mode of operation.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0028] FIG. 1 depicts an exemplary simplified depiction of an image processing system in accordance with a first embodiment of the present invention.

[0029] FIG. 2 depicts an exemplary simplified depiction of an image processing system in accordance with a second embodiment of the present invention.

[0030] FIG. 3 depicts an exemplary code dictionary in accordance with the second embodiment of the present invention.

[0031] FIG. 4 and FIG. 5 are flowcharts of exemplary embodiments of the invention.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0032] In pre-press imaging, particularly for ~~the~~ flats having an entire plate worth of image information, most of the data is often either solid black or solid white, and hence digitally represented in binary form by a stream of repeating 1's or 0's, respectively. For halftone images all of the data is black and white, i. e., 1's and 0's.

~~FIG. 1000~~ FIG. 1 is a somewhat simplified, exemplary depiction of a image processing system 1000 according to ~~the~~ first embodiment of the present invention. The system 1000 includes a raster image processor ~~(, hereinafter "RIP"),~~ 1050, ~~which~~ an imager controller 1100, and an imager 1150. The raster processor includes a processor 1050a and a memory 1050b for storing processing instructions and other data ~~as required~~. The RIP 1050 receives image data and converts the image data into encoded data. The ~~image encoded~~ data is then transmitted to ~~an~~ the imager ~~control processor~~ controller 1100, which includes a processor ~~1000~~ 1100a and a memory 1100b for storing processing instructions and other data ~~as required~~. The imager controller 1100 generates imager control signals ~~to the imager 1150 in accordance with~~ based on the data received from the RIP ~~1050, to~~ 1050. The imager controller 1100 sends the imager control signals to the imager 1150. ~~More particularly~~ Specifically, the control signals from the processor 1100a control the operation of the imager scanning assembly 1150a ~~so as to~~ form the image on a medium 1150c, such as, a film or plate, supported within the imager 1150. As shown, the imager includes ~~1150 uses~~ a cylindrical drum 1150b ~~for to~~ supporting the medium 1150c. ~~Alternatively, but the imager 1150 could alternatively include~~ use a flat bed or external drum for supporting the medium.

[0034] In a first mode of operation, which will hereafter be referred to as a flat banding "banded mode," the RIP 1050 receives an 80 inch ~~times~~ x 50 inch color separated image having 2400 dots per inch. ~~Preferably~~ The image could, for example, correspond to multiple pages of a magazine. In such a case, using imposition software on a front end preprocessor (not shown), the image could, ~~for example, correspond to multiple pages of a magazine. In such a case, the image~~ is be formatted such that the image printed from the imaged medium 1150c is positioned ~~so as to~~ facilitate cutting, folding, and stitching to create multiple properly printed and positioned magazine pages. ~~In any event, the~~ The RIP 1050 converts the entire image into multiple gigabytes of ~~data~~ encoded data as a single job.

[0035] However, due to processing power limitations of RIP 1050, the entire image cannot be converted into encoded data in a single operational process. ~~Accordingly~~ Instead, the RIP 1050

slices the image is sliced into bands, prior to the data being converted, typically by the RIP 1050. If converted by the RIP 1050, this processor 1050a may perform the banding of the image may be performed by the RIP processor 1050 or a. However, conversion could also be preformed outside the RIP, for example by a preprocessor (not shown) could also perform the banding of the image. In the preferred embodiment, the RIP processor 1050a convertsencodes the image data representingin each of the bands into encoded data in a separate operational process. Thus, the job of encoding all the image bands, and therefore the entire image, is completed only after the RIP 1050 performs multiple, separate operational processes are performed by the RIP 1050 so as to convert all of the image data representing the bands for the entire image into encoded data. In practice, the larger the image, the smaller is each image band is, with all bands preferably being equal in size. Furthermore, the larger the image, the greater the startup time required before beginningencoding can begin. This limitation is caused by the conversion of the image data to encoded data, because the larger the image, the moreincreased pre-conversionencoding processing requiredfor larger images. Additionally, the more objects included in the image, the more memory that is required.

[0036] In the second mode of operation, sometimes referred to as a hereinafter "page assembly mode," the RIP 1050 receives, as multiple smaller images, an 80 inch-times- x 50 inch color image having 2400 dots per inch. In this case, one of the multiple images, which is primarily white. This image might be characterized as a template image, includes and include information such as registration marks, color gradients, and identification marks, but is primarily white. Each of the The other of the multiple images could, for example, be the images for pages of a magazine, each image being a separate page of a magazine. Here, the RIP 1050 may be operated to convertencode the image data representing the entire template image into encoded data as one job and to convertencode all of image the data representingof the other of the multiple images into image data inas another job. When fully convertedboth jobs are complete, the multiple imagesentirety of the image will be represented by encoded data.

More particularly, in [0037] In the page assembly mode, the image is divided into page assemblies, ~~One of which the pages is a primarily white template image which that is, primarily white, and that is typically processed by the RIP processor 1050a without being split into bands.~~ The other ~~of the multiple images are pages,~~ however, are typically sliced into bands prior to being encoded by the RIP 1050. Because the area of each of the ~~other multiple page images is much smaller than the area of the entire image discussed with reference to used in the first mode of operation, fewer bands are required and, as.~~ As a whole, it will take less time to ~~convert encode~~ the image data representing the multiple images ~~into encoded data~~ in the page assembly mode than the time required to ~~convert encode~~ the image data representing the entire image into image data in the banding mode discussed above. Thus, the RIP processor 1050a ~~converts encodes~~ the image data for each of the bands, ~~for in each of the other multiple images into encoded data~~ non-template pages, in a separate operational process. The job, or jobs if the template image is pre-processed, is completed only after ~~the multiple operational processes are performed to convert all of the image data representing the multiple images forming pages, which together represent the entire image, into are encoded data.~~

[0038] Although, the image discussed ~~with reference to in the page assembly mode description~~ may be the same as ~~the image discussed with reference to in the prior page assembly banded mode description,~~ conversion encoding in the page assembly mode will typically result in even a greater amount of encoded data than the conversion encoding in the previously discussed banding mode. For example, the RIP 1050 may generate two gigabytes of encoded data may be generated by the RIP 1050 to represent the image in the banding mode, while yet generate three gigabytes of image encoded data could be generated by the RIP 1050 to represent for the same image in the page assembly mode because there would be. The discrepancy is due to the page assembly mode retaining more uncompressed data. Further, ~~whether the banding or page assembly modes are utilized by the RIP 1050, the entire image cannot be converted into encoded data in a single operational process due to processing power limitations of the RIP 1050.~~

[0039] In the banded mode, the image bands may be satisfactorily converted using the LZW/PB technique. In the page assembly mode, a template image, of say 16 megabytes, may be satisfactorily converted using a PB technique since it is primarily white or primarily black and so is made up of mainly a repeating stream of 0s and 1s, respectively. However, the PB technique will often produce unsatisfactory results if/when used to convert the bands of the other of the multiple images. Accordingly, in the page assembly mode, these bands are converted using an LZW technique. Thus, in the page assembly mode, different compression techniques are utilized for a single image and perhaps even in a single job. j

Accordingly, in the first [0040] Referring to FIG. 4, accordingly, in one embodiment of the present invention, the RIP 1050 is selectively operable can operate in either the banded or the page assembly mode operation. Hence, in operation, the The RIP 1050 initially scans the received image data representing the image, or image bands if the bands are sliced during pre-processing, to determine if banded mode or page assembly mode operations is/are required appropriate. Alternatively, the image may be sliced into bands during pre-processing. (STEP 3000). If it is determined the RIP 1050 determines (STEP 3010) that banded mode operation is required, the RIP 1050 implements an LZW is appropriate, it encodes the image data using the PB technique to convert the image data into encoded data. (STEP 3020). If, on the other hand, it is determined, however, the RIP 1050 determines that page assembly mode operation is required, is appropriate, it uses a different technique (STEP 3030). Referring to FIG. 5, the RIP 1050 further determines if the page image data represents a template image or banded image (STEP 3050). If it is determined that the page image data represents a template image, which as described is likely to be primarily black or white, the RIP 1050 implements uses the PB technique to convert encode the template image into encoded data (STEP 3020). If, however, it is determined that the page image data represents a banded image, the RIP 1050 implements uses the LZW technique to convert encode the banded image data into encoded data (STEP 3060). The selective operation of the RIP 1050, depending on in response to the received type of image data received, facilitates the a more efficient and effective processing of different types of large images than has been was previously obtainable in conventional RIPs.

~~According to~~ **[0041]** ~~In a second embodiment of the present invention, as encoding can be interrupted and a more efficient compression technique may be applied. The invention chooses to interrupt the processing if the stream contains a section of all black or all white data. As a stream of sequential data is processed prior to encoding, if, at the start of the sequence, the immediately preceding character, which is~~ has yet to be encoded, matches the next character in the stream, and this next character is either solid black or solid white (e.g., and hence digitally represented in binary form by a stream of all 1's), or solid white (e.g., a stream of all 0's), encoding is interrupted. During the interruption, a determination is made as to whether the invention determines if one or more characters, immediately following the next character in the sequence, also match the next character.

~~The second~~ **[0042]** ~~Another embodiment of the invention will now be described with reference to FIG. 2. As shown, FIG. 2 represents a somewhat simplified, exemplary depiction of an image processing system 2000. The system 2000 includes~~ comprises a raster image processor (, hereinafter "RIP), 2050, which an imager controller 2100, and an imager 1150. The RIP 2050 receives an image and converts ~~encodes the image into encoded data. The encoded data is then transmitted to imager controller 2100, which generates imager control signals to the imager 1150 in accordance with the encoded~~ based on decoded data received from the RIP 2050 to control the 2050. The imager 1150 after decoding the received data in FIG. This imager 1150 ~~is identical to the imager 1150 of FIG. 1. More particularly~~ Specifically, ~~the control signals from the imager controller processor 2100a control the operation of the imager scanning assembly 1150a so as to form the image on a medium 1150c, The which medium~~ could be identical to the medium 1150c in FIG. 1. The medium 1150c is supported within the imager 1150 of FIG. 2. As shown, the imager 1150 includes a cylindrical drum 1150b for supporting the medium 1150c.

[0043] ~~In the second~~ this ~~embodiment of the present invention, the RIP processor 2050a implements a compression technique, which will hereafter be referred to as the "AGFA technique." The AGFA compression technique. Using the AGFA compression technique,~~

~~variable length of can process strings of byte based data can be processed. Processing using the~~
~~AGFA technique will be of variable length. Using the AGFA technique is substantially faster~~
~~then the LZW compression technique for many large image applications than the LZW~~
~~compression techniques, while still providing satisfactory results for both color images as well as~~
~~those which that are primarily black and white. Furthermore, the AGFA technique is not limited~~
~~to single bytes of data, and is therefore capable of compressing data on an arbitrary pixel or bit~~
~~boundary basis. Additionally, the AGFA technique is capable of providing a higher compression~~
~~rate than both either the PB and or the LZW compression techniques implemented separately.~~

[0044] An exemplary representation of a stream of sequential input data as it would appear entering a RIP processor 2050a prior to encoding could, for example, include the string of characters "'abc0 . . . 01c01'". The string "'0 . . . 0'" is a large string of zero's, ~~for example~~
~~representing image information for 32 k pixels~~zeros.

[0045] Using the AGFA technique, the encoding and decoding processors, i.e. the RIP processor 2050a and imager controller processor 2100a, must coordinate ~~on~~ the transmission and receipt of codes, similar to the coordination required by the LZW techniques. However, as will be described ~~further~~ below, the AGFA technique uses a compression dictionary containing four pre-defined compression codes. The characters in the input string are scanned to determine if a scanned sub-string of characters match certain ~~of these~~ pre-defined compression codes. If so, the matching sub-string of characters is encoded with the applicable pre-defined compression code. If a sub-string of characters does not match a pre-existing code, ~~a new codes~~ corresponding to the sub-strings ~~are~~is added to the dictionary.

~~Further~~[0046] Furthermore, the AGFA technique provides a look-ahead function, ~~in which to~~
~~determine whether or not. The look-ahead function determines if~~ the sub-string is greater than a minimum number, preferably 6,6 bytes, and if ~~so~~ the sub-string is encoded with a new code, ~~which includes; the new code comprising any applicable pre-existing code; and the length of the~~
~~code field. The length of the code field~~ is the width of the pre-existing code, with ~~this~~

~~code length~~ forming the most significant bits and serving as a continuation indicator, ~~and any.~~
~~Any new coding, with this coding code follows the length; the new code~~ forming the least significant bits. Like the LZW techniques, sub-strings are initially defined by codes having 9 bits or digits, but may be increased to up to 12 bits to add new codes. Once the 12-bit limit is exceeded, the dictionary is reset and subsequent codes are again defined initially with 9 bits.

[0047] Referring to FIG. 3, in the AGFA technique, four codes are predefined and stored in the code dictionary ~~3000-0n1300~~ in the RIP's memory 2050b as codes 1330. In the present example these codes are: the code 100, representing a sub-string of all ~~zero-bytes~~ zeroes, which corresponds to solid white; the code 101, representing a sub-string of all ~~one-bytes~~ ones, which corresponds to solid black; the code 102, representing a reset; and the code 103, representing ~~an~~ the end of the compressed encoded data. In the present example, codes 104, 105, ~~and 106~~ 106, etc. represent sub-strings of new patterns which are generated during the processing of the input data ~~ea~~ and also stored ~~on~~ in the RIP's memory 2050b in the code dictionary ~~3000-1300~~. It will be recognized that because codes for the strings corresponding to white and black are partially predefined, ~~reduced processing is required to generate these codes, since the.~~ Since predefined codes can simply be read by the RIP processor 2050a from the dictionary ~~codes as, reduced processing is required to generate these codes.~~

[0048] Using the AGFA technique, the RIP processor 2050a first sets a reset code 102 (read from the code dictionary ~~30001300~~) and reads the "'a'" in the sequence and the "'b'" immediately thereafter ~~in the sequence~~. The RIP processor 2050a then determines from the code dictionary ~~3000,1300~~, if a code exists for the character sequence "'ab'". Since, in this example, no such code exists at this point in the processing, a new code 105 is generated to represent the new pattern string "'ab'" and the new code is stored in the code dictionary ~~30001300~~ ~~on~~ in memory 2050b. The RIP processor 2050a continues ~~by~~ and readings the "'c'" immediately following the "'b'" in the sequence. The RIP processor 2050~~ba~~ determines if a code exists for the character sequence "'bc'". Since, in this example, no such code exist at this point in the

processing, a new code 106 is generated to represent the new pattern string "bc" and the new code is stored in the dictionary 3000-1300.

[0049] The RIP 2050 continues by reading the "0" immediately following the "c" in the sequence. The RIP processor 2050a determines if a code exists for the character sequence "c0". Since, in this example, no such code exists at this point in the processing, a new code 107 is generated to represent the new pattern string "c0" and the new code is stored in the dictionary 3000-1300. Also, because the "0" is recognized as a special character, the RIP processor 2050a automatically scans ahead to read the next character in the sequence to determine if it matches with the initial "0". If the sequence's next character is not a matching "0," the scanning ahead is immediately discontinued and the RIP processor 2050a proceeds with normal processing. If so, the next character is a matching "0," the scanning ahead continues on a character by character basis until no match with "matching "0" is found, at which point, the scanning ahead is discontinued and normal processing continues.

[0050] In this exemplary application of the AGFA technique, the RIP processor 2050a scans ahead and counts the number of "repeated "0" or "1" bytes in the sequence. Preferably, a compression threshold is pre-established and stored in the RIP memory 2050b. For example, the threshold might correspond to a 4 to 1 compression rate. If such a threshold is utilized, and the number of "repeated "0" or "1" bytes counted is less than the number required to meet or exceed the threshold, e.g. if the sequence consists of only one or two zeros or ones, then a new code would be established for the sequence in the normal manner. Only if the number of "repeated "0" or "1" bytes counted meets or exceeds the threshold, is the sequence encoded using the applicable pre-defined code 100 or 101.

[0051] Assuming in the present example that the number of "0" bytes counted by the RIP processor 2050a meets or exceeds the threshold, the bits in the "count is determined to be position" represent a repeat count. Either 9, 10, 11, or 12 bits can be used to code the repeat count. However, if the count is so great that more than 11 bits would be required for the

encoding, a continue code which may be generated by the processor 2050a or retrieved from memory 2050b, is inserted as the least significant bit in the output code ~~to enable~~. This continue code enables the output codes representing the entire sequence of zeros or ones to be strung together. ~~Accordingly~~ Therefore, no matter how long the sequence is, the low or ~~least~~ significant bit of each output code within the string of output codes would represent either an end code or a continuation of the coding. Hence, 1 bit is sacrificed for the end/continuation bit leaving 8, 9, 10, or 11 bits for the repeat count.

[0052] Accordingly, in the present example, the output code for the repeat count of "0" characters would be formed ~~with~~ using the code "100" to indicate that this is a sequence of "0" characters, followed by "102" representing a first portion of the repeat count, and "001" indicating that the output codes for the repeat count continues. Thus, the first code in the string of repeat count output codes would be "100102001". The second code in the string of repeat count output codes could be "102001", "102001" with the "102" representing a second portion of the repeat count, and "001" indicating that the output codes for the repeat count continues. The last code in the string of repeat count output codes could be "0201". The high bit of the last output code "0201" is made clear to indicate indicates that this is the end of the repeat count information in this field.

[0053] Using the repeat count multiple ~~output codes~~ times, the strung ~~together~~ codes for the entire repeat count would, in the above example be "1001020011020010201". Thus, the strung together multiple bytes of output codes provide a full representation of the repeat count. In practice, five output codes may be used to represent up to four billion characters.

Notwithstanding the number of bits in the output codes, the high bit is used to represent the count. Accordingly, whatever output code size is used, full advantage is taken of all available bits for the repeat count.

~~It is perhaps worthwhile emphasizing here that conventional~~ **[0054]** Conventional LZW techniques lack the ability to scan ahead. Conventional PB techniques, on the other hand, scan

ahead to locate matches with whatever character has been read and must fully generate the match coding for each matching sequence. In contrast to both, the present invention scans ahead to locate matches with only selective characters, preferably only white and black, respectively represented herein by "'0'" and "'1'". Furthermore, the ~~present invention uses~~ scan use a predefined code for each of the selected characters, e.g. white and black. Hence, and hence the match coding for each matching sequence need only be partially generated, since the predefined codes, e.g. codes 100 or 101, which identifies the applicable sequence as a sequence of white or black characters are pre-generated and need only be read from the code dictionary ~~3000-1300~~. Accordingly, the present invention is capable of providing superior encoding of, ~~for example,~~ large images using less computing resources and computing time.

[0055] As noted above, once the RIP processor 2050a determines it is at the last "'0'" in the sequence, i.e. by determining from ~~the scanning ahead on a character by character basis that a~~ the next character does not match ~~with a "0", "0,"~~ the scanning ahead is discontinued and normal processing ~~continues~~ resumes. Thus, the RIP processor 2050a continues by reading the "'1'" immediately following the last "'0'" in the sequence. The processor 2050a determines if a code exists for the character sequence "'01'". Since, in this example, no such code exist at this point in the processing, a new code 108 is generated to represent the new pattern string "'01'" and the new code is added to the dictionary 1300. The processor 2050a proceeds by reading the "'c'" immediately following the "'1'" in the sequence. The processor determines if a code exists for the character sequence "'1c'". Since, in this example, no such code exists at this point in the processing, a new code 109 is generated to represent the new pattern string "'1c'" and the new code is added to the dictionary 1300.

[0056] The processor ~~further~~ 2050a then proceeds by reading the "'0'" immediately following the second "'c'" in the sequence. The processor 2050a determines if a code exists for the character sequence "'c0'". In this example, such a code, i.e. code 107, does exist. The RIP processor 2050a ~~also~~ then scans ahead to determine if another "'0'" immediately follows this

occurrence of "c0". Since, in this case the ~~RIP processor 2050a determination~~ next character is ~~negative, not a "0,"~~ the scanning ahead is discontinued and normal processing ~~continues~~ resumes.

[0057] The processor 2050a ~~now~~ proceeds by reading the "1" immediately following the second "c0" in the sequence. The processor 2050a determines if a code exists for the character sequence "c01". Since, in this example, such a code does not exist, a new code 110 is generated to represent the new pattern string "c01" ~~which~~ and the new code is added to the code dictionary 1300. Because the "1" is the last character, the combination of the last generated code and the last character can be represented as "1071". The RIP processor 2050a also scans ahead to determine if another "1" immediately follows this occurrence of "c01". Since, in this case the ~~RIP processor 2050a determination~~ next character is ~~negative, not a "1,"~~ the scanning ahead is discontinued ~~and normal~~. Normal processing would ~~continue~~ resume if further characters remained to be encoded. However, since the "c01" and 1 are the final characters, encoding ends.

[0058] The processor 2050a ultimately generates encoded output data ~~forming a of the form~~ "102abc10010200110200102011071103". The sequence ~~including the~~ includes the encoded string of characters "102abc1001020011020010201107-1103" and an end code, code 103.

[0059] Similar to the LZW techniques, in the AGFA technique, the RIP processor 2050a builds a tree of numerous codes ~~generated using a combination of pre-defined or other and generated codes and~~. The AGFA technique is thereby is-capable of providing satisfactory results even though the processing is performed on a byte by byte basis to find repeating bytes. ~~However, as compared~~ Compared to LZW techniques, in the AGFA LZW technique, the AGFA technique requires substantially reduced processing time and resources ~~required by the RIP 2050 to encode large sequences is substantially reduced through the use of~~ because it uses special pre-defined codes. The decoding processor, i.e. the imager controller processor 2100a, ~~which could serve as a printer controller (not shown) or be some other type decoding device,~~ builds a similar tree using the codes in the code dictionary received from the encoding processor, i.e. the RIP processor

2050a. ~~Basically~~ Aside from the imager controller processor 2100a, the decoding processor could serve as a printer controller (not shown) or be some other type of decoding device. The decoding processor performs the reciprocal of the encoding process to decode the encoded sequence characters "102abc10010200110200102011071103". It should be understood that the encoded data could if desired be transmitted to the decoding device via a direct communications link, a local network, a public network such as the Internet, or some other type of network. Further, such communications may be by wire communications or wireless communications. It will also be recognized by those skilled in the art that, while the invention has been described above in terms of one or more preferred embodiments, it is not limited thereto. Various features and aspects of the above described invention may be used individually or jointly. Furthermore, although the invention has been described in the context of its implementation in a particular environment and for particular purposes, e.g. imaging, those skilled in the art will recognize that its usefulness is not limited thereto and that the present invention ~~can~~may be beneficially utilized in any number of environments and implementations. Accordingly, the claims set forth below should be construed in view of the full breadth and spirit of the invention as disclosed herein.